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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1246  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 4379  
RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 1053  
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY 0691  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY 2302  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 8100  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 9371  
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 6312  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000204

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TH](#) [CB](#) [BM](#) [LA](#) [VM](#) [JA](#)  
SUBJECT: JAPAN STRENGTHENING TIES WITH MEKONG REGION

REF: A. TOKYO 00124

[1](#)B. TOKYO 00174

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Japanese Government plans to fund infrastructure and poverty reduction programs in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, including \$20 million to develop poverty-stricken areas and another \$20 million for construction projects on the two "East-West Corridors." Former Prime Minister Abe had ear-marked the \$40 million for the region in 2007. Burma will not be a direct recipient of this aid. Moreover, Japan has no plans to introduce new development projects in Burma, with the exception of humanitarian aid such as polio vaccines. Meeting in Tokyo January 17, the Japanese and Mekong Region Foreign Ministers agreed to meet again on a regular basis, with the host country rotating, but a timeframe for the next meeting has not been set. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The five Mekong Region Foreign Ministers (from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma) met Prime Minister Fukuda on January 16, attended a lunch with Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura on January 17, and held separate thirty-minute bilateral meetings with FM Koumura. Komura and his counterparts discussed ways to increase economic and environmental cooperation, exchanged views on regional foreign policy issues, including North Korea, and expressed support for the Khmer Rouge trials in Cambodia. They also agreed to designate 2009 as "Mekong-Japan Exchange Year" to promote political, economic, cultural, and youth exchange programs.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Other meeting highlights included the signing ceremony for several economic partnership agreements, including: the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement; the Japan-Thailand Economic Partnership Agreement; and, an agreement between Japan and Cambodia calling for the "liberalization, promotion, and protection of investment." Japan and Vietnam also agreed to continue to maintain momentum on concluding an economic partnership agreement in the near future.

[1](#)4. (C) FM Koumura agreed to use approximately \$20 million in grants from the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) to

implement a series of projects along the area known as the "Development Triangle" that spans Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The 23 projects will be aimed at improving infrastructure, building schools and hospitals, and poverty reduction. Japan will provide an additional \$20 million for improved transportation on the two East-West Economic Corridors. The first East-West Corridor runs between Vietnam and Burma through Laos and Thailand and the second East-West Corridor connects Cambodia with Thailand (reftel).

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Burma  
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15. (C) MOFA First Southeast Asia Division Deputy Director Atsushi Kuwabara told Embassy Tokyo political officer on January 18 that Japan currently has no plans to develop the Burmese part of the corridor. In addition, Japan has no separate plans to introduce new development projects in Burma, with the exception of humanitarian aid such as polio vaccines. Komura publicly emphasized the "urgent need for genuine dialogue" in Burma and called on Burma to cooperate with the United Nations at the Mekong FM meeting (reftel).

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Japan-Mekong Parliamentary Friendship League  
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16. (C) Twenty LDP Diet members from the Japan-Mekong Parliamentary League -- founded in 2007 -- hosted a breakfast for the Mekong Foreign Ministers on January 17. Although Japan already has separate parliamentary leagues for all of the Mekong countries, ruling Liberal Democratic Party Diet members decided to establish a regional Mekong Friendship League, and plan to open membership to non-LDP Diet members soon, Kuwabara explained.

17. (C) The foreign ministers agreed to hold future Mekong foreign ministerial meetings on a regular basis, with the

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host country rotating. Kuwabara noted that while MOFA agrees with this, Japan was unable to commit to a timeframe for the next meeting because it would be difficult for FM Koumura to travel overseas due to domestic political constraints. Kuwabara noted that it is always somewhat difficult for the Japanese FM to travel abroad, but that the current domestic political climate makes it even more difficult for him to travel at this time. In addition, several of the Mekong foreign ministers invited FM Koumura to visit their countries, but FM does not have any specific plans to visit the Mekong region.

18. (C) Bio Note: Japan provided simultaneous interpretation during meetings with Foreign Minister Koumura with the aim of using Japanese and Mekong region languages rather than English. The Thai Foreign Minister, however, told MOFA he "felt more comfortable" speaking English than Thai, and asked the interpreter to use English instead of Thai.

Comment  
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19. (C) MOFA has repeatedly told Embassy Tokyo that it currently has no plans to introduce new non-humanitarian aid to Burma. MOFA officials have emphasized that press reports that Japan plans to provide new aid to Burma for the construction of the East-West Corridor are misleading and explained that all humanitarian assistance to Burma will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure it does not benefit the regime. MOFA South Asia Deputy Director General Ihara, who had just returned from visiting Burma, told Embassy Tokyo on January 15 that the Burmese Foreign Minister felt "isolated" because all of the infrastructure projects being discussed during the Mekong Foreign Ministers meeting were related to projects in other countries, and do not include Burma.

SCHIEFFER